

OPEN AND SHUT?

Wednesday, April 20, 2016

The Open Access Interviews: Sir Timothy Gowers, Mathematician

(A print version of this interview is available [here](#))

As the use of green open access policies looks increasingly like a failed strategy, and as universities, research funders, and governments in Europe seek to engineer a mass “flipping” of subscription journals to gold OA, has the open access movement reached a watershed moment?

If so, how will it develop from here, is it headed in the right direction, and who should be leading the way?

One remarkable thing about the OA movement is that it has primarily been driven by people other than researchers.

The President of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, José van Dijk [drew attention](#) to this recently when she pointed out that the debate about open access has been mostly about what university administrators, librarians, government, funding organizations and publishers think, not what researchers think, or need.

Yet it is researchers who create, quality check, and consume the papers that make up scholarly journals. They are the originators of, and primary audience for, the literature, so should they not have a large say in how scholarly communication develops?

As the financial consequences of gold OA become apparent, and as researchers are confronted with ever more onerous bureaucratic rules (policies) requiring them to make their work OA, however, this is likely to change. Certainly we can see researchers beginning to take more of an interest in the topic, and the signs are that they are not at all happy with the mess and confusion created by the OA movement.

Might we, therefore, see researchers become the foot soldiers of the next battle in the revolution the OA movement began? And might they want to do things somewhat differently?

If so, given his credentials who could claim to be better qualified to lead the troops over the top than Sir Timothy Gowers?

Read the Q&A in the linked pdf and see if you agree. The interview is prefaced with an introduction.

To download the text click [here](#).



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Please note the postscript to this interview [here](#) The open-access publisher Dove Medical Press has a controversial past and I have writ...



Open Access: "Information wants to be free"?

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Posted by Richard Poynder at 09:39



12 comments:

Richard Poynder said...



There is some commentary on this here: <http://bit.ly/1MHKggJ>

April 20, 2016 11:08 am

Stevan Harnad said...



Evolutionarily Stable Strategies

[This comment was written before I read Richard Poynder's Interview of Tim Gowers. Having posted this, I will go on to read the interview and make my comments in the next posting.]

I don't know about Richard, but I have not despaired of green, of green mandates; I've just grown tired of waiting.

I don't see pre-emptive gold (i.e., pre-green "fool's gold") as an alternative but as just another delay factor, the principal delay factor being human sluggishness.

And I think the notion of a "flip" to fool's gold is incoherent -- an "evolutionary unstable strategy," bound to undo itself: not only because it requires self-sacrificial double-payment locally as well as unrealistic collaboration among nations, institutions, funders, fields and publishers globally, but because the day after it was miraculously (and hypothetically) attained globally it would immediately invite defection (from nations, institutions, funders, and fields) to save money (invasion by the "cheater strategy"). Subscriptions and gold OA "memberships" are simply incommensurable.

The only evolutionarily stable strategy is offloading all but one of the things that publishers traditionally do onto green OA repositories, leaving only the service of peer review to be paid for as fair-gold OA.

But that requires universal green OA first, not flipped pre-emptive fool's gold.

It will all eventually sort itself out that way after a huge series of false-starts. My loss of patience is not just with the needless loss of time but with the boringly repetitious nature of the recurrent false starts. I'd say my last five years, at the very least, have been spent just repeating myself in the face of the very same naive bright-eyed, bushy-tailed and non-viable non-starters. Locally in space and time, some people sometimes listened to my objections and my alternative strategy, but globally the very same non-starters kept popping up, independently.

So (with an occasional exception like this) I've stopped preaching. Time will either show that I was wrong or, like evolution, it will undo the maladaptive strategies and stumble blindly, but inevitably toward the stable strategy (which also happens to be the optimal one): universal green first, then a rapid downsizing and transition to scalable, affordable, sustainable fair-gold. Amen.

April 20, 2016 11:46 am

Stevan Harnad said...



Evolutionarily Stable Strategies II

1. Publisher green OA embargoes are ineffectual against the right green OA mandate: immediate deposit plus the almost-OA Button
2. That a "self-styled archivangelist" has left the arena is neither news nor an OA development. It is indeed just symbolic.
3. The fool's gold "flip" is an evolutionarily unstable strategy, fated to flop, despite the fond hopes RCUK, Wellcome, VSNU or MPG.
4. The "impact factor" is, as ever, utterly irrelevant to OA, one way or the other. Metrics will only be diversified and enriched by OA.
5. An immediate-deposit requirement is not an "onerous bureaucratic rule" but a few extra keystrokes per paper published: a no-brainer.

(A print version of this eBook is available here) Earlier this year I was invited to discuss with Georgia Institute of Technology libraria...



The Life and Death of an Open Access Journal: Q&A with Librarian Marcus Banks

Librarians have been at the forefront of the open access movement since the beginning, not least because in 1998 the Association of Research...



The Open Access Interviews: OMICS Publishing Group's Srinu

Babu Gedela

***Update: On August 26th 2016, the US government (Federal Trade Commission) announced that it has charged OMICS with making false claims, ...

New Assignment

Slashdot is this week interviewing NYU professor Jay Rosen , a long-time proponent of civic journalism . Rosen recently started NewAssignm...



The Open Access Big Deal: Back to the Future

On a superficial reading open access is intended to do no more than what it says on the can: provide an internet-based scholarly communicat...



Copyright: the immovable barrier that open access advocates underestimated

In calling for research papers to be made freely available open access advocates promised that doing so would lead to a simpler, less cos...



Community Action Publishing: Broadening the Pool

We are today seeing growing dissatisfaction with the pay-to-publish model for open access. As this requires authors (or their funders or ins...



PLOS CEO Alison Mudditt discusses new OA agreement with the University of

California

The Public Library of Science (PLOS) and the University of California (UC) have today announced a two-year agreement designed to make...

Researchers are not "foot-soldiers" but finger-soldiers, and the immediate-deposit mandate is just intended to set those last few digits into motion (the publish-or-perish mandate having already mobilized the legions ahead of it).

6. Leaders are welcome (if not Wellcome), but boycotts are busts (and there have been [plenty](#)).

7. Exposés of publisher profiteering are welcome, but not solutions. In any case, the root problem is not affordability but accessibility, and providing access (via green OA) is also the solution, first to accessibility and then, as a natural matter of course, to affordability (post-green [fair-gold](#)).

8. Founding a new gold OA journal is hardly new. Offloading everything but peer review onto green repositories is also not new (in fact it will be part of the post-green end-game: fair-gold). But making it scalable and sustainable pre-emptively would be new...

9. Subsidizing fair-gold costs would be fine, if someone had the resources to subsidize at least 30,000 journals across all disciplines. But while journals are being sustained by subscriptions, and there is no alternative way to access the contents, there is unlikely to be enough subsidy money to do the job. (Universally mandated green, in contrast, would allow journal subscriptions to be cancelled, releasing the money to pay for fair-gold out of just a fraction of the [windfall savings](#).)

10. The impact factor, it cannot be repeated often enough, is *absolutely irrelevant* to (green) OA. The known track-record of journals, in contrast, will always be a factor.

April 20, 2016 1:55 pm

Stevan Harnad said...



Evolutionarily Stable Strategies III

11. Open "peer" review, or crowd-sourced quality control, likewise a notion aired many times, is, IMHO, likewise a [non-starter](#). Suitable for peddling products and blog postings, but not for cancer cures and serious science or scholarship. (That said, anyone is everyone is already free to post their unrefereed work for all comers; that's what blogs and open commentary are for...)

12. Open online collaboration is very welcome (and more and more widespread) but it is a supplement, not a substitute, for publishing peer-reviewed findings.

13. Mathematics and, to a lesser extent, physics, are manifestly atypical fields in that their practitioners are (1) more willing than others to make their own unrefereed findings public and (2) eager to see and use the unrefereed findings of others. If this had been true of other fields, Arxiv would long ago have become the global unrefereed preprints and refereed postprint repository for all fields, universal (central) green OA would already have been reached long ago, and the transition to fair gold would already have taken place. (Arxiv has been held up -- including, for a while, [by me](#) -- as the way to go since 1991. But things have not gone that way. That's why I switched to promoting distributed institutional repositories.)

14. What if the "P" in APCs -- for those who are "imPlacably opposed" to article processing charges -- stood instead for *Peer-Review*, and paid only for the editorial expertise in the refereeing (the peers review for free): selecting referees, selecting which referee recommendations need to be followed, selecting which revisions have done so and are hence accepted. These are the sole costs of fair gold -- but they are predicated on universal green to "overlay" on...

15. The two crucial features of peer review are *expertise* and *answerability*. This is what is provided by a qualified editor and established journal and absent in self-selected, crowd-sourced, take-it-or-leave-it vetting (already proposed many times, including by another [distinguished mathematician](#)). "Fair OA" is synonymous with fair gold, but universal green is the only viable way to get there.

16. [Open peer commentary](#) is a fine idea (if I do say so myself) but it is a supplement to peer review, not a substitute for it.

Where is the Open Access Foundation?

While the term Open Access (OA) has its origins in the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), the concept and practice of OA has bee...

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April 20, 2016 1:56 pm

Unknown said...



> I had a horrible fantasy the other day, when it occurred to me that publishers could try to reintroduce the bundling concept in connection with APCs.

As Gandalf said to Frodo, the fantasy was late in coming. It is already happening and it has been happening for some 3 years when the fantasy occurred to sir Gowers. [Springer Open Choice for Polish Institutions](#) programme was started in Poland in 2010 and it is essentially just the bundling APC programme sir Gowers referred to. Polish government pays annual flat fee to Springer and for that any Polish-based researcher can waive his APC in Springer hybrid journals incorporated into the programme (e.g. BioMed Central wasn't included - but *maybe* only because it was purchased by Springer in 2011). And of course results are very much like sir Gowers predicted - if anyone has a choice between a Springer journal and any other journal, the Choice is for Springer.

By the way, Springer Open Choice is great counterexample for Richard's concerns about APCs in developing world. (footnote 3: "A problem that will be that much greater for researchers in the developing world"). I daresay it most probably won't be. Big Legacy Publishers, like all parasites, are evolutionary adapted to maximizing profits they get off their feeders without killing them at the same time. The statistics for Springer Open Access choice are confidential, but I think I can safely say that when compared to what [Wellcome Trust spends on APCs](#) the average cost per article is *several times* lower for Poland than for UK. I'm not of course trying to say that Poland is a developing country, but I guess it's a prominent example for that Big Legacy Publishers are doing in the new financing model the very same thing they were and are doing in the old one: adjusting their prices not to the quality of services they deliver but to the size of the wallet of their customer.

April 21, 2016 9:25 am

Stevan Harnad said...



...And let's get our figures straight

[Rick Anderson](#) posted the following comment on Richard Poynder's posting in [google+](#): *"Institutional Green OA mandates (as distinct from non-mandatory OA policies) are effectively nonexistent in the US, and it's difficult to see how they could ever become widespread at the institutional level. That's just the US, of course, but the US produces an awful lot of research publication."*

According to [ROARMAP](#), which was recently upgraded to expand, classify and verify the entries, although it is probably not yet exhaustive (some mandates may not yet be registered) there are 764 OA policies worldwide, at least 629 of them Green (i.e., they either request deposit)

The following are the total(subset) figures broken down by country for total policies and the subset *requiring* - not requesting - deposit for Institutional and Funder policies.

Worldwide:

Inst 632 (390)

Fund 132 (82)

US

Inst 96 (69)

Fund 34 (11)

UK

Inst: 93 (79)

Fund 24 (23)

Germany

Inst 26 (2)

Fund 1 (0)

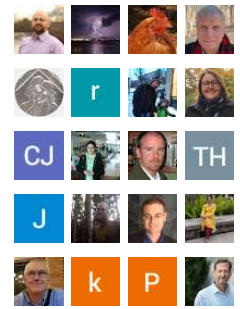
Netherlands

Inst 11 (6)

Fund 0

France

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Inst 17 (3)
Fund 3 (3)

Canada

Inst 15 (7)
Fund 12 (9)

Australia

Inst 31 (15)
Fund 2 (2)

April 21, 2016 12:26 pm

Anonymous said...

I am not sure why the OA access movement should follow Timothy Gowers as their leader. Does he offer jobs? Not many I guess. Does he give money to finance big OA conferences where the usual OA crew can keep congratulating themselves on their new financial engagements with publishers and institutions?

Seriously though, what are Max Planck Society and the others planning to achieve with their backroom deals with Elsevier and SpringerNature? As Richard pointed out, it will end up with scientists in developing being finally able to read for free what the Western elite has published.

Whoohoo. They will struggle though to scrape enough cash to publish their own papers in the same journals. Maybe this is why the (Western) OA movement insists, predatory publishing is not a problem at all? So once the great golden flip happens, the developing world scientists will still have their cheap trash bin publishers to dump their research in?

Leonid Schneider

April 21, 2016 9:05 pm

Rick Anderson (editor) said...



In response to Stevan on "get(ting) our figures straight": Despite its recent improvements, ROARMAP remains, unfortunately, an unreliable guide to the prevalence of OA mandates in the United States. Of the 96 US policies that it tracks (and to which it sometimes, but not always, provides viable links), none of them requires faculty authors to make their work available on an OA basis. In fact, I have yet to discover a single U.S. institutional policy that does so. If I've overlooked one (or more), I would be very interested to hear about it.

In the meantime, by all means, let's do get our figures straight. As of now, I believe the correct figure for institutional OA mandates (as distinct from deposit-only mandates without an OA component) in the United States is zero.

April 21, 2016 10:01 pm

Richard Poynder said...



Judging by his comments here and on [Google+](#) I am thinking that perhaps the introduction I wrote to the interview with Timothy Gowers has stimulated Stevan Harnad to come out of his (OA advocacy) retirement. See also [this](#).

April 22, 2016 6:40 am

Unknown said...



In response to Rick Anderson's response to Stevan Harnad I'd like to point out that "discovering a single US institutional policy that does require to make the work available on OA basis" is as a matter of fact quite easy.

I took about 2 minutes to excercise a search in Roarmap under conditions *Country matches any of "United States of America" AND Deposit of item matches any of "Required" AND Making deposited item Open Access matches any of "Required"*

I think it matches all of mr. Anderson's conditions. The resulting list covers 40 policies. I hope everyone here agress that $40 > 0$.

Here it is (you don't even have to make it yourself now)

I hope it helps to do a seemingly necessary reality check. Even if mr. Anderson thinks that Roarmap is an unreliable source because *some* policies lack URLs I do believe he may find some time to scan through a resulting list of policies and pick some that after all do have URLs attached. One day he might even go as far as searching for policies that lack URLs himself.

* * *

I'd like also to point out that mr. Anderson's response strangely resembles an example of [Raising the Bar Fallacy](#). I do hope any resemblance is purely coincidental.

April 22, 2016 9:21 am

Rick Anderson (editor) said...

Hi, Tomasz --

The strategy you've followed is a very good one for identifying US institutional OA policies that are characterized by ROARMAP as mandatory. Unfortunately, the whole point of my comment is that ROARMAP regularly characterizes those policies as mandatory when they are in fact optional, and the examples you've provided are perfect examples of this problem. I spot-checked several (Harvard Medical School, Georgia Tech, Bucknell, Northern Illinois, Kansas), and in every case, even when deposit is required, OA is not required -- a waiver is granted upon request of the faculty member. (Feel free to check all of them if you'd like; I'd be willing to bet money that all of them contain what is functionally the same waiver language.) So despite what it says in ROARMAP, these are not mandatory OA policies; in every case, OA is optional, not mandatory.

Also, I should point out that your result set includes funders as well as institutions. I do not dispute that funding agencies (such as the Gates Foundation) require OA.

I'd be interested to hear in what way you believe I've committed the Raising the Bar Fallacy in this conversation.

April 22, 2016 12:32 pm

Stevan Harnad said...

On Almost-"Retirement" and "Almost-OA"

Whoops, just noticed Rick Anderson's ripostes now.

To make a long story short, in a email interactions prior to his posting here (since blogged [here](#)), Rick first suggested that the deposit requirement of the Harvard Faculty of Arts and Science OA policy was not mandatory because it could be waived.

Peter Suber then corrected Rick that deposit could *not* be waived: only rights-retention could be waived.

Rick is also mistaken that no US institutional policy requires OA.

What is true, however, is that no US policy (nor, as far as I know, any policy in the world, institutional or funder-based) requires OA immediately upon deposit: They all (regrettably -- and, I would add, needlessly) allow an OA embargo, which is usually for one year.

And here too I would agree with Rick: OA after a one-year embargo is not really OA. It's too late. OA has to be provided immediately upon publication (or, better, immediately upon acceptance), otherwise precious access and impact are lost, some of it irretrievably.

And that (i.e., the needless compliance with publisher OA embargoes) is the reason immediate deposit (even without immediate OA) is so important: Because only if the refereed final draft is deposited immediately upon publication (or, better, immediately upon acceptance) can the institutional repository's semi-automatic [copy-request Button](#) provide almost-immediate almost-OA, with one click from the requestor and one click from the author.

And this compromise almost-immediate almost-OA is not only sufficient to tide over research needs during the one-year publisher embargo, but, once immediate-deposit mandates are universally adopted, this Almost-OA will be enough to allow institutions to cancel subscriptions, thereby forcing publisher cost-cutting, downsizing and a [transition to "Fair Gold" OA charges](#), paid in exchange for the service of peer review alone.

But I've already said that many times before. So, in answer to Richard's perplexity about my "retirement" (actually, all I'd said was that I had left

the OA arena), I stepped back in for a moment to say it again (because it's still true).

(About losing the battle? I didn't mean it...)

And I didn't retire: I just got bored.

May 03, 2016 5:16 am

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